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40 Asbestos cleanup O&M group begins daunting task March 10

The EPA's operation and maintenance work group will meet Wednesday, March 10, from 1-3 p.m. in The Venture Inn's Fireside Room.

The working groups will discuss short-term and long-term operation and maintenance issues associated with the Libby Asbestos Cleanup.

The group includes, representatives from the EPA, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Lincoln County, the cities of Libby and Troy and W.R. Grace.

According to the EPA, operation and maintenance is a general term for the long-term actions or programs that usually follow or complement the primary cleanup at Superfund sites.

"People often think of O&M as the phase of the cleanup that occurs after EPA leaves town, but some parts of O&M may occur at any time," said Wendy Thomi, EPA spokesperson.

Typically, O&M may include: maintenance or repair of containment structures such as landfill covers, walls; local ordinances or notification procedures for new discoveries of contamination;

cleanup and disposal procedures; educational programs; or long-term operation of ground water treatment systems such as those for the Libby Groundwater Site.

Generally, O&M is the responsibility of potentially responsible parties or states, but many parties can have a role.

"In Libby, there are many unique issues associated with the long-term aspects of cleanup," Thomi said. "Many of these need to be addressed immediately, and some will require extensive coordination and planning."

To begin planning for O&M, EPA is working with a group of people who may have the legal authority or financial responsibility for implementing the long-term parts of the cleanup plan. The

group will be an advisory/discussion group, not a decision making body.

EPA ultimately makes the cleanup decisions with the benefit of the information that local government and others can provide, Thomi said.

"While the start-up group may be small, many people will be asked to participate as the group discusses issues over which they have influence or in which they have an interest," Thomi said.

Under the Superfund law, the State of Montana is responsible for 10 percent of the cost of the ongoing remedial action. And if Grace emerges from their bankruptcy in healthy financial condition, they would be involved as the responsible party.